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News

Research Spotlight: Getting cheesy with dairy scientist Dennis D'Amico

By [Grace McFadden](#) - January 27, 2021

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D'Amico's Microbiology lab made up of graduate students, undergraduate research students, and student interns. (Photo courtesy of D'Amico's Microbiology Lab)

Dennis D'Amico, professor of Animal Science, is the head of the [D'Amico Microbiology Lab](#), a research group at the University of Connecticut that studies dairy science.

The research done by the D'Amico lab covers a variety of topics within the dairy industry, in particular the production of cheese. One aspect of this research is the safety of cheese and other dairy production.

"One of the areas that we really try to work on is a sort of an applied research approach where we identify food safety issues that are our most pressing for the industry," D'Amico said.

One of the ways the D'Amico Lab accomplishes this is by working with industry professionals and dairy producers on testing the safety and efficacy of new commercial dairy products.

D'Amico works directly with dairy producers across the region and the nation to address problems facing the industry. Providing research to dairy producers helps extend the shelf life of their products, which in turn helps both the dairy producers as well as consumers. D'Amico gave the example of shredded mozzarella cheese.

"Shredded mozzarella cheese tends to mold, so people throw it away before they use it all. That's a food waste issue, and it's a marketing issue. If a company can extend the shelf life of their cheese, they have a competitive edge," D'Amico explained.

The D'Amico Lab also studies the quality of certain cheeses, which, as D'Amico explained, is determined by the microbes in the cheese.

"Many of these cheeses, someone will just dump raw milk into a wooden barrel, and voila, there's this fantastic, crazy cheese with all sorts of microbes growing. And the question is, well, where did they come from?" D'Amico said.

The answer, as it turns out, is quite complicated. So, the D'Amico Lab studies all parts of the process of cheese production.

"We'll study milk as it comes out of the teat all the way until the cheese is finished, and we'll see where the microbes are coming from," D'Amico said. "Are they coming from the hands of the milker, or are they coming from the equipment they're using? Are they coming from the air? And once they're there, what are they doing? Are they just sitting around? Are they producing unique flavors and unique aromas?"

This information can also be useful to dairy producers so as to optimize their products, D'Amico explained.

D'Amico himself started out as a pre-med student at the University of Vermont before doing undergraduate research that introduced him to dairy science.

"If I didn't do undergrad research, I would have never found how much I like dairy microbiology. I wouldn't ever have found how much I like research. I would have never found out that I love teaching. I would have never done any of that," D'Amico said.

Because of this, D'Amico encourages undergraduate students to follow any interest in research they may have.

"I think students that have any interest in research owe it to themselves to pursue that, and to pursue anything they think they might have an interest in."

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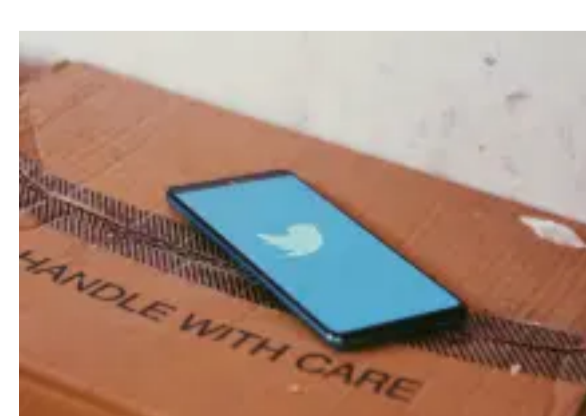
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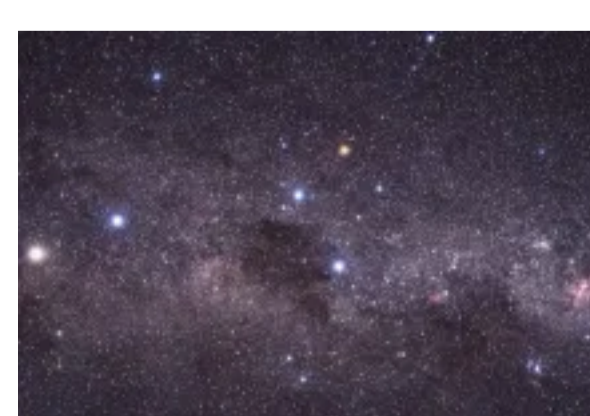
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